

Professor Kevin Wheldall inducted into the Innovators' Hall of Fame

At the fifth annual Macquarie University Innovation Awards, held on 6 May, the most coveted award was won by Professor Kevin Wheldall in recognition of a lifetime of improving educational outcomes for children with learning difficulties.

Professor Kevin Wheldall's induction into the Innovators' Hall of Fame – the first to occur in three years – was based on the success of his Making Up Lost Time In Literacy (MULTILIT) initiative, developed in 1995.

“For more than a decade, Kevin and his team have been helping children who have struggled to learn to read,” explained Macquarie University Vice-Chancellor, Professor Steven Schwartz. “Without MULTILIT's intervention, many of them would have fallen by the wayside. In particular, whole communities – such as remote Indigenous townships in Cape York – will benefit from Kevin's knowledge and passion for

generations to come. I cannot think of a more deserving recipient of this honour.”

In his comments about Kevin's work, Dr Brendan Nelson MP said “... Kevin...you've made a difference; a difference to the lives of other human beings, helped them find their potential, strengthened Australian society and made us richer for knowing you. Congratulations and thank you.”

A short video clip can be viewed at <http://www.mq.edu.au/innovationawards/winners>



Professor Kevin Wheldall with Dr Brendan Nelson MP

Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage

By Dr Robyn Beaman

In July 2009, the report of the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision was released in relation to Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID). OID 2009 is the fourth report in a series commissioned by heads of Australian governments in 2002 (COAG) to provide regular reporting against key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage.

In December 2007 and March 2008 COAG committed to six ambitious targets to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage:

- closing the life expectancy gap within a generation;
- halving the gap in the mortality rate for Indigenous children under five within a decade;
- ensuring all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities have access to quality early childhood programs within five years;
- halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade;
- halving the gap in Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment rates or equivalent attainment by 2020;

- halving the gap in employment outcomes within a decade.

In its report in relation to the target for Reading Writing and Numeracy, the Steering Committee detailed four programs in section 4.34 'Things that work' – early literacy engagement. The first of the programs outlined was MULTILIT, and the second was MINILIT (also a MULTILIT program). The other two programs were the National Accelerated Literacy Program (NALP), an elaborated version of the Scaffolding Literacy Program, used extensively in the Northern Territory, and a Tasmanian program called Finding Your Pathway into School and Beyond. The text from the report in relation to MULTILIT programs is reproduced below:

“The MULTILIT pilot program improved the reading ability of Indigenous children at Coen State School in Cape York in Queensland. The program involved taking the 15 least proficient readers and giving them intensive, systematic instruction in phonics for 17 to 18 weeks by specialist teachers (IRUA 2006; Devine 2006).

Since the Coen pilot, MULTILIT has been expanded as part of the broader Cape York Welfare Reform

Trial, which began on July 1 2008, to Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge (OATSIP 2008), and was rolled out in Aurukun in term 1, 2009 (Queensland Government unpublished). In addition, the MULTILIT program provided assistance to Indigenous students at the Redfern Tutorial Centre in NSW, under the auspices of the Exodus Foundation. Results for the second intake of MULTILIT students under the 2007 program at the Centre showed that after 18 weeks of instruction the cohort made average gains of: 13 months in reading accuracy; 7 months in reading comprehension; and 15 months in spelling (Australian Government unpublished).

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Happy MULTILIT students in Coen, QLD

Magic glasses

By Professor Kevin Wheldall

When I was a teenager I was intrigued by advertisements in the popular press for magic glasses, also known as ‘X-ray specs’, that apparently allowed one to see straight through the outer clothing and glimpse buxom ladies in their underwear. I resisted the temptation to buy a pair but later on at university I did wear tinted spectacles in an effort to look cool in spite of being severely shortsighted. I quite literally saw the world through rose-coloured glasses – but then it was the late sixties ... What I did not realise at that time was that they might also have cured my dyslexia, had I been unfortunate enough to have been dyslexic. It would be just too good to be true, would it not, if we could cure dyslexia with magic glasses?

The answer, sadly, is yes: it is too good to be true. But that does not stop thousands of parents whose children are struggling to learn to read to pay out large sums for tinted lenses of doubtful utility. Nor does the lack of convincing evidence for effectiveness seem to restrain the enthusiastic advocacy for coloured glasses by those who service this market. Let’s look at the facts.

First, it does not make conceptual sense to attempt to address a disability by supposedly alleviating problems in a modality unrelated to the known cause of the difficulty. You would not recommend a hearing aid for someone with a poor sense of smell. But as we know, and as the vast majority of reading scientists now believe, dyslexia, and reading disability more generally,

almost always results from difficulties in processing language; specifically it appears to be a phonological processing deficit. Children who struggle to learn to read do so not because they cannot see the letters or words clearly but rather because they find difficulty in breaking words up into their component sounds. So why would coloured glasses make any difference?

Second, even if we were to accept that there might be a small number of apparently dyslexic children whose problems are visual in nature, is the proposed remedy a credible solution? The problem here is that the hypothesised disabling condition, known as the scotopic sensitivity syndrome or the Irlen syndrome, is so unreliable diagnostically that many experts in vision doubt its very existence. In other words, coloured lenses appear to be the cure for which there is no known disease.

Third, and hence unsurprisingly, the evidence for the efficacy of coloured lenses in helping to redress reading disability is tenuous at best with some studies finding no effect and some others claiming significant effects. Unfortunately, the studies claiming to provide positive evidence for efficacy are seriously flawed methodologically and are not accepted by most reading scientists.

Finally, you don’t have to take my word for this but perhaps you might take seriously a joint policy statement on ‘Learning Disabilities, Dyslexia and Vision’ (revised 2009) from the American Academy of Pediatrics (Section on Ophthalmology, Council on Children with Disabilities), the

American Academy of Ophthalmology, the American Association for Pediatric Ophthalmology and Strabismus and the American Association of Certified Orthoptists. Their conclusion is unequivocal: “Currently, there is no adequate scientific evidence to support the view that subtle eye or visual problems cause learning disabilities. ... Furthermore, the evidence does not support the concept that vision therapy or tinted lenses or filters are effective, directly or indirectly, in the treatment of learning disabilities.” That this form of therapy simply does not work is plain to see, with or without tinted glasses.

Exodus Graduation

One of the largest users of the MULTILIT program, The Exodus Foundation, has had another moving but joyous graduation ceremony. In July this year over 50 children from the Ashfield and Redfern tutorial centres, proudly received their certificates from Rev. Bill Crews.

After the graduation ceremony Rev Crews was quoted as saying: “What really touched me during the ceremony was when the mothers spoke. They talked of their children coming to life. In being able to read these kids realised they had a future and also were able to plot their life in the scheme of things. Just being able to read the street signs and a menu meant, to them, they existed. It struck me, that’s what Exodus is about. We might be feeding people and educating kids but what we really do is giving them life.”

MULTILIT and the National Partnership Program in Literacy for NSW

The Commonwealth Government has allocated significant funding to the NSW Department of Education and Training to implement the National Partnership Program. One hundred and fifty schools across the state and from all three education sectors have been selected to participate in the program which aims to raise the standard of literacy or numeracy teaching in schools. Schools, supported by their regional office, are required to identify a focus area (literacy or numeracy) using current school data and then choose a whole school/classroom program as well as an individual intervention to help improve the target focus. We were

very pleased that the *MULTILIT Reading Tutor Program* was selected as one of the research-based programs on offer for this Partnership Program. MULTILIT has worked with schools since its inception to provide an excellent teaching tool based on quality research so we are extremely excited about the possibility of introducing the *MULTILIT Reading Tutor Program* to an even wider audience. We hope that many hundreds of low-progress readers will be able to access quality instruction through this initiative and we are very grateful for the opportunity to take part. More information on the National Partnerships can be found at www.det.nsw.edu.au.

What is Response to Intervention?

By Professor Kevin Wheldall

Response to Intervention (RtI) is a tiered model of instruction for students experiencing difficulties in acquiring basic skills. Tiered instruction typically comprises instruction at three increasing levels of intensity. In the context of reading instruction, it is predicated upon exemplary initial teaching in reading and related skills being provided at the whole class level during the first 6 to 12 months of schooling. This is known as Tier One instruction. Experiencing initial instruction based on evidence-based best practice will ensure that the vast majority of students will get off to a good start in learning to read and spell. Those students who begin to fall behind, often operationally defined as those in the bottom 25 per cent of what might be expected for the age cohort, are then offered Tier Two instruction.

Tier Two instruction typically takes the form of more intensive, more targeted small group literacy instruction, again based on what scientific research has shown to be the most effective

methods and curriculum content for teaching lower-progress readers. Students are taught in small groups of four to six students, preferably by a teacher or paraprofessional who is well versed and skilled in the delivery of effective remedial instructional programs. Such instruction should be provided daily, if possible for at least half an hour. This more intensive (and, of necessity, more expensive) option is reserved only for those 'failing to thrive' under the regular classroom regime of Tier One. Tier Two level intervention is likely to resolve the difficulties experienced by the great majority of lower-progress readers and will enable them to get 'back on track' and progressing at a similar level to their classroom peers.

There will always be a few students, however, who fail to respond even when offered this more intensive level of Tier Two instruction and these students need Tier Three intervention. Tier Three intervention does not necessarily involve appreciably different instruction from that offered in Tier Two except insofar as the instruction provided is even more intensive, in more specifically targeted

form, tailored to the specific needs of the individual student on a one-to-one basis, and preferably provided by a reading expert.

Within the RtI model, students with a learning disability such as dyslexia are defined as those students needing Tier Three intervention, students who are still struggling even when they have been offered both exemplary initial reading instruction (Tier One) and subsequent exemplary remedial instruction (Tier Two). These are typically the students who are likely to need continuing literacy support, possibly over many years. In our present state of knowledge, we have no way of telling in advance just who these students will be other than by using the 'suck it and see' approach of RtI coupled with very careful progress monitoring. The question then arises of how best to judge whether a child is responding well to instruction or not and hence whether she or he needs Tier Two or Tier Three intervention.

Traditional reading tests are of limited use for this purpose since they are not

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MINILIT, a modified version of MULTILIT, was offered to younger students in Years 1 and 2 at the Redfern Tutorial Centre. Results for the second intake of MINILIT students showed that, after 15 weeks of instruction, the cohort made average gains of: 8 months in single word recognition and 11 months in spelling" (Australian Government, unpublished).

Source: Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2009: 4.34.

MULTILIT is proud to be involved, and recognised for its part to play, in this most important area of addressing entrenched disadvantage for the first Australians.



The MULTILIT Tutorial Centre, Coen State School

Training update

Demand for our Professional Training Workshops continues, with workshops planned Australia wide and in New Zealand over the coming months. In 2009, we have had well over three hundred dedicated professionals and paraprofessionals attend our workshops across Australia and New Zealand. The training team thanks all of you for your participation and for the positive feedback you provided.

In what is great news for NSW teachers, our Professional Training Workshop is now officially endorsed by the NSW Institute of Teachers. This will assist those NSW teachers who are required to meet the professional development requirements to maintain their accreditation at Professional Competence. Providing teachers with top quality professional development is our aim and to have this recognised by the NSW Institute of Teachers is very gratifying.

Two successful three-day accreditation courses have been run this year with a third commencing on 9 November.

This course provides greater understanding of the Reading Tutor Program and includes some training on Positive Teaching, additional intervention strategies, monitoring and data collection. MULTILIT Registered Practitioners are required to do the course but it is also open to teachers and is recommended for those overseeing the program on a large scale.

MULTILIT also offers on-site consultancies for schools or clusters of schools that are unable to attend our regular workshops. This can be a cost-effective way to train large numbers of staff. Several schools have opted for an on-site consultancy this year, taking our trainer as far as Mt Isa in Queensland.

If you would like to find out more about our training activities, please contact our training manager, Kyle Pitt, on 1300 55 99 19, or you can visit our website for up-to-date training information.

Introducing MULTILIT Word Attack Skills Extension Program

- Do you teach students who have finished the Reading Tutor Program but still need help?
- Do you teach older students who have learnt basic decoding skills but are finding it hard to improve their reading to a level where they can access the more academic demands of the curriculum?
- Do you teach older students who are finding reading laborious, lack fluency and have become demotivated?



After completing the *Word Attack Skills* component in the *MULTILIT Reading Tutor Program*, many students are able to generalise the strategies they have learnt to all text. However, in some cases students do need further assistance to continue to make progress. *MULTILIT Word Attack Skills Extension* follows a set hierarchical sequence of skills, focusing on strategies on how to tackle longer words with confidence. This is a follow-on program from the *Word Attack Skills* component of the *MULTILIT Reading Tutor Program* but will be of benefit to any older student (aged eight and above) who is experiencing ongoing reading difficulties after mastering basic early reading skills.

The program takes students through the more complex letter combinations, affixes and multi-syllable words. The same format is used as in the *Word Attack* component of the *MULTILIT Reading Tutor Program* with some additional features.

- The longer scripted intervention demonstrates effective strategies for tackling longer, more complex words.
- There is a strong scripted spelling component to reinforce reading.
- A small vocabulary component has been included.

Like the first program, *Word Attack Skills Extension* needs to be done at least three times a week in conjunction with *Reinforced Reading*.

For more details on this great new MULTILIT product or to order your *MULTILIT Word Attack Skills Extension Program* please go to www.multilit.com or call 1300 55 99 19.

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usually sensitive enough to pick up small gains over short periods of time, nor should they be repeated frequently or after only a short time interval, if they are to provide reliable measures. On the other hand, it would not be in the best interests of the child to remain for too long on a program under which he was failing to progress and which will only be detected when he is retested at the end of the year or even after six months.

Curriculum-based fluency measures have emerged as the preferred alternative for progress monitoring. Oral reading fluency may be measured by passage reading tests, having a student read aloud a passage of text and counting the number of words read correctly in one minute. This seemingly rather crude index in fact correlates very highly with other more complex measures of reading including both reading accuracy and reading comprehension. Because this exercise may be repeated frequently with different samples of text from the curriculum at a similar level of difficulty, this provides a ready means of tracking progress over time. Moreover, these curriculum-based measures are quick and easy to administer.

Curriculum-based measurement provides the means by which we can determine the tier of support a student needs. First, a passage reading test (or tests) may be used as a simple screening instrument to determine which students are struggling to keep up with their peers, say the bottom 25 per cent. These students are then offered Tier Two small group remedial instruction. By subsequently monitoring progress on a weekly or even fortnightly basis over about six weeks we may then determine who is responding readily and who is not and hence who is likely to need more intensive, individualised Tier Three instruction for greater and continuing duration, and even whom we might choose to refer to as having 'dyslexia', for administrative/funding purposes.



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MULTILIT Presentation Evenings

In May we held our first 'renewed' presentation evening. Thank you to all those who braved the wet and windy weather to find out more about our reading programs. We are now conducting these evenings every quarter, here at the MULTILIT head office. Our second evening was recently held on 24 August. These nights are especially useful to those who are new to MULTILIT, covering such topics as:

- Why MULTILIT?
- The MULTILIT Clinic and the available programs
- MULTILIT in the Community
- Training
- Registration
- New products

Presentation evenings are appropriate for teachers, principals, parents and speech pathologists. For details of our next evening, please call 1300 55 99 19.

Now available!

The second revised edition of *Developments in Educational Psychology*, edited by MULTILIT Director and Chairman, Professor Kevin Wheldall, has just been published. For further information visit: www.routledge.com/education.

MULTILIT comings and goings

- Joselyn Tobar joined MULTILIT in March 2009 as our new Receptionist/Administrative Assistant
- Dr Saskia Kohnen joined MULTILIT in July 2009 as Research Fellow in the MULTILIT Research Unit